

**REDISCOVERED ARTISTS  
OF  
ESSEX COUNTY  
(1865 - 1915)**



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**ESSEX INSTITUTE  
Salem, Massachusetts**

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*Gift of*

REDISCOVERED ARTISTS  
OF  
ESSEX COUNTY  
(1865 - 1915)

An Exhibition held at the Essex Institute

July 1 - November 1, 1987

*Organized by*  
Frederick A. Sharf and John H. Wright

ESSEX INSTITUTE  
Salem, Massachusetts



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Cover: *On Cape Ann*, ca. 1880, by Frank K.M. Rehn. (See p. 12)

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication  
ISBN 0-88389-094-1

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1987

## PREFACE

This loan exhibition of landscape and marine paintings by Essex County artists celebrates the opening of the Essex Institute's Frederic A. and Jean S. Sharf Gallery. The Sharfs share a deep interest in nineteenth-century American art and are long-time friends and enthusiastic supporters of the Institute.

Since the early nineteenth century, numerous painters have been attracted to Essex County, and many prominent artists such as Fitz Hugh Lane and Frank Benson were born in the county. As a regional museum, the Essex Institute has always had an interest in the art and artists of Essex County. Over the last two decades, exhibitions of individual artists or groups of artists have been organized by Mr. Sharf and John Hardy Wright, former assistant curator. In this exhibition we focus on paintings of Essex County's picturesque scenery.

A committee of regional scholars, collectors, and museum professionals has been assembled to develop a new and more consistent research approach to the fine arts in Essex County. The results of their work will be seen in forthcoming exhibitions here and at other locations around the county.

The Essex Institute is most grateful to the exhibition's lenders, to Mr. Sharf, and to John Hardy Wright, who is guest curator.

Anne Farnam  
*President*

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## LOCATIONS OF ART COLONIES OF ESSEX COUNTY

**ANNISQUAM**

**EAST GLOUCESTER (ROCKY NECK)**

**GLOUCESTER**

**IPSWICH**

**LANESVILLE**

**LYNN**

**MAGNOLIA**

**MANCHESTER**

**MARBLEHEAD**

**NEWBURYPORT**

**ROCKPORT**

**SALEM**

## ART COLONIES OF ESSEX COUNTY

Essex County, and the Gloucester area in particular, was identified by artists in the 1850s as a location for unique scenic beauty and for the picturesque activities of the local inhabitants. The presence of Fitz Hugh Lane in Gloucester was the catalyst which attracted other artists, much as the presence of Millet in Barbizon established that village as an artists' mecca in France. Lane had established friendships with various artists based in Boston when he worked as a lithographer in the city during the 1840s, and his closest associate, John W. A. Scott, visited Gloucester to sketch with Lane. In addition, Lane developed at least one known pupil, Mrs. Mary B. Mellen, the wife of a local Universalist minister.

After the Civil War, American artists evidenced a conscious desire to seek rural sites, partly as a reaction to the encroachments of industrialization and partly in order to work in companionship with other artists. The development of art colonies in Essex County and in other parts of the United States was directly influenced by the experience of numerous American artists who had trained in Europe from 1865 to 1890.

Within Europe, some artists began to rebel against the conventional system of academic training. They became exposed to a new way of life by being forced to leave the city for the summer months; the Spring Exhibitions were held in May and the Academy art schools closed at that time. The artists began to congregate as groups in various rural locations.

The different art colonies shared some common characteristics. The rural site, while remote and unspoiled, was also readily accessible via the growing network of railroads. The site was populated by country people engaged in work such as farming and fishing that put them into direct contact with nature. Also, the site offered inexpensive accommodations to the artists, as well as the potential for an uncomplicated social life.

Each site developed its own *esprit de corps*. Life in the French art colonies established the pattern for all subsequent colonies. The artists enjoyed a vibrant camaraderie during their working hours, when each artist could benefit from the exchange of criticism by his peers, and in the evening hours, when social activities enlivened the community.

The art colonies encouraged *plein-air* painting; works of art were recorded directly on canvas in the actual outdoor setting of the particular scene. The great role model for such painting was the French artist, Jules Bastien-Lepage. He had also emphasized the importance to an artist of establishing roots in a countryside location that had special meaning to the artist, thus encouraging a generation of American artists who studied in Europe to continue the practice upon their return to the United States.

American artists working in Europe had frequently compared the scenery at various European art colonies to the scenery of Essex County. Cecelia Beaux was reminded of Gloucester while working at Concarneau; Charles Green recalled Lynn while working at Newlyn. Arthur Wesley Dow returned from Pont Aven to find comparable artistic potential in Ipswich. William Lamb Picknell came back from Pont Aven in 1880 to Annisquam, where he created a French-style art colony that ultimately attracted thirty artists.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, Essex County was unique in the number of locations within one geographic area that became separate art colonies. Perhaps this was owing to the fact that Essex County presented the artist with two special aspects of rural beauty within a short travel distance — rugged coastal views and tranquil inland scenery.

Coastal scenery ranged from rocky shores to sandy beaches; from peaceful harbors to busy fishermen at work; from full-rigged ships under sail to quiet ships at anchor; and from wharves and warehouses to charming seaside villas. Inland scenery included hay meadows and marshes; peaceful country roads and local historic landmarks; steepled villages and unpopulated rural vistas.

Within Essex County, one sees an interesting progression: Gloucester during the 1850s was a community with working artists; William Morris Hunt created the first real summer art colony in Magnolia during the 1870s; and during the 1880s Annisquam, Ipswich, and Lynn each contained fully developed year-round art colonies. The proliferation of art colonies naturally spawned art clubs and art schools. The art schools attracted summer tourists and developed into commercial attractions, such as the school started in Lanesville by John I. Coggeshall in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Our show brings together a cross section of artists and subjects. We start with the luminists of the 1850s (Mellen and Scott) and we end with the impressionists of 1910 (Noyes and Wendel). We see the influence of Bastien-Lepage and the Newlyn School in the work of such artists as Kenyon, Richardson, and Valenkamph.

This exhibition is a step in the direction of rediscovering numerous artists who worked in Essex County, and in exploring and reevaluating the various art colonies, the many art schools, and the prominent teachers who flourished here. Work at the art colonies of Essex County involved all media. While we have chosen oil paintings for this particular show, future exhibitions will include watercolors, pastels, etchings, and engravings.

*Frederic A. Sharf*

#### Footnotes

1. Michael Jacobs, *The Good and Simple Life: Artist Colonies in Europe and America* (Phaidon Press, Oxford, 1985) PP. 45,169. Important art colonies existed in the nineteenth century throughout the world from Newlyn and St. Ives in Cornwall, England to Heidelberg, a suburb of Melbourne, Australia. In the Scandinavian countries artists gathered at Skagen, Denmark, a village on the top of Jutland; Modum, Norway, a small town south of Christiana; Varberg, Sweden, a seaside village of Goteborg; and Aland, Finland, an island in the Baltic sea. On the continent some of the better known colonies were at Concarneau and Pont Aven in Brittany; Barbizon and Grez-Sur-Loire outside of Paris, France; Dachau, a suburb of Munich and Worpsswede, a village near the North Sea in Germany; and in Russia artists gathered at a summer estate named Ambramtsevo, thirty miles from Moscow.

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## CATALOGUE OF PAINTINGS

JOHN P. BENSON (1865-1947). *Coastal Fishing*. ca. 1885, oil on canvas, 28 x 44 inches; anonymous loan.<sup>1</sup>

John Prentiss Benson, born in Salem, painted sporadically throughout his life. He was the younger brother of Frank W. Benson. He exhibited his work later in his career and won a gold medal at the 1937 Jordan Marsh Exhibition in Boston. His granddaughter is the noted local sculptor, Beverly Benson Seamans.

The back of this canvas is inscribed "Philip Benson", and the patented metal keying devices for the stretcher are stamped by the maker "1883" and "1885", indicating that the painting probably dates to the late 1880s.

NATHANIEL L. BERRY (b. 1859). *Trees in Autumn*. ca. 1880, oil on academy board, 5½ x 8½ inches; anonymous loan.

*On the Coast of Lynn*. 1891, oil on canvas, 12 x 18 inches; anonymous loan.

Nathaniel L. Berry was born in 1859 in Lynn. He graduated from Lynn High School in 1877 and went to work in the cutting room of a shoe factory, C.S. Sweetser and Company. While working, Berry studied drawing from 1877 to 1882 under Edward Burrill at the Lynn Evening Drawing School.

Berry abandoned the shoe trade after 1882. He attended Cowles Art School in Boston. He worked for various photographers retouching negatives, and he earned a living from his crayon portraits.

Berry opened a studio in Lynn at the YMCA building, where he taught drawing and executed crayon-portrait commissions. From 1885 to 1890 Berry studied marine painting under Clark Oliver and painted landscapes from nature with Edward Burrill. His first exhibition of oil paintings was held in 1890.

During the 1890s, Berry traveled throughout New England and to Nova Scotia. However, he never did rely on the sale of his paintings to earn a living. He became supervisor of drawing at the Lynn public schools from 1886 to 1893 and at the Newton public schools from 1893 to 1908. He was a member of the Boston Art Club from 1890 to 1908. In 1904 he exhibited at the St. Louis World's Fair, where he won a gold medal. In 1908 he was crippled by an accident, and his career as an artist ended.

1. Measurements are to the nearest one-quarter inch; height precedes width.

JOHN LESLIE BRECK (1860-1899). *Gloucester Harbor*. ca. 1890, oil on canvas, 25 x 13 inches; anonymous loan.

*View Across Ipswich Bay*. ca. 1890, oil on canvas, 18 x 22 inches; anonymous loan.

John Leslie Breck was born at sea off the coast of Guam on April 10, 1860, on a clipper ship commanded by his father. He grew up in eastern Massachusetts, where his interest in art developed. His artistic skills were so apparent that in 1878, at the age of eighteen, he went to study in Europe.

He started in Leipzig, but soon moved to the Royal Academy in Munich, where he spent three years. Breck then spent a year in Antwerp in the studio of the history painter, Charles Verlat, before returning to Boston at the end of 1883.

The years 1884 and 1885 were spent painting along the Charles River and in Worcester County. In 1886, Breck went to Paris to study at the Academie Julian. During the summer of 1886 Breck visited Giverny and found life there so appealing that he abandoned Paris for full-time residence in Giverny from 1887 to 1890. There he worked with Monet, painting in the fields while absorbing advice and encouragement.

Breck returned to Boston in 1890, and for the next decade he developed his impressionistic style. He traveled extensively in search of subject matter, returning to England for the winter of 1891-1892, and traveling to Venice in 1896. He died unexpectedly on Saturday, March 18, 1899 at the St. Botolph Club in Boston. A memorial exhibition was held at the National Art Club in New York City that included such Essex County canvases as *Moonrise, Essex, Mass.*; *Surf at Gloucester*; and *Ipswich Bay*.

ALFRED THOMPSON BRICHER (1837-1908). *Afternoon Calm, near Manchester*. ca. 1888, oil on canvas, 18 x 39 inches; lent by Vose Galleries of Boston.

Born in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, A. T. Bricher painted the craggy shoreline in his home state and in Maine and Massachusetts during his professional artistic career. Bricher's first studio was in Newburyport (1858). He later had studios in Boston and New York City. He was a member of the Boston Art Club, the American Watercolor Society, and the National Academy of Design.

This oil painting may have been painted in 1888, when Bricher was making sketches of Baker's Island in Salem Harbor and of the Beverly beach.

J. APPLETON BROWN (1844-1902). *Curzon's Mill, Newburyport*. ca. 1885, oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches; lent by Attorney and Mrs. Michael Early.

J. Appleton Brown was born in 1844 in West Newbury. As a youth he was attracted to drawing and painting; his parents encouraged his interest in the arts. He studied for one year with A. T. Bricher, who had a studio in Newburyport in 1858. He graduated from Newburyport High School.

Brown's only interest was in becoming an artist. In 1865, he set up a studio in Boston at the Studio Building, where he shared space with B. C. Porter. In 1866 he went to Paris to sketch in the Louvre. In the winter of 1867 he entered the Paris studio of Lambinet. In 1868 Brown returned to Boston.

Brown married Miss Agnes Bartlett in 1874 and went on a honeymoon to Paris. After visiting Paris, the Browns went to ville d'Avray, where Appleton could work with Jean Baptiste Camille Corot, who was a major influence on Brown's future painting.

The Browns returned to Boston in 1875, where Appleton associated himself with a new mentor, William Morris Hunt. Brown traveled with Hunt on painting trips to Essex County during the next two years.

Brown's career as an artist was dominated by the French influence stemming from his association with Lambinet, Corot, and Hunt. Yet, in 1886, at the suggestion of Frank Millet, Brown traveled to England to join the art colony at Broadway in Worcestershire. He did not stay long and was back in Boston by 1887. In 1896 he was elected an Associate of the National Academy.

GEORGE ELMER BROWNE (1871-1946). *Haying*. ca. 1915, oil on canvas, 21 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 25 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches; lent by Heritage Co-operative Bank, Salem.

Born in Salem, George Elmer Browne studied painting in Paris, as did many of the artists represented in this exhibition. In 1928 Browne was elected to the National Academy of Design in New York, two years after the French government made him a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor.

Browne had a studio in New York City, but preferred the summer artistic life of Provincetown on Cape Cod. He ran the West End School of Art in Provincetown, beginning in the teens, and died there in 1946.

In a 1968 catalogue of the artist, George A. Perret states: "George Elmer Browne will always remain a great champion of the naturalistic school in America. The great number of superb poetic paintings which he left will always bear mute testimony to his greatness and his love of nature."

EDWARD BURRILL (1835-1913). *Landscape with Fence*. ca. 1880, oil on canvas, 10 x 14 inches; anonymous loan.

Edward Burrill was born on March 29, 1835, in Newburyport. He graduated from the Putnam Free School in Newburyport and went to work as a clerk in a dry goods store. By the time of his marriage on April 17, 1869, to Frances E. Shaw (known as Fannie), Burrill was employed as an engineer in Woburn.

During these formative years Burrill's interest and skill as an artist was developing to the point where in 1860 he went to work in Boston as a lithographer with the firm of J. H. Bufford. During this period Burrill also worked as a photographer and as a drafting assistant in the architectural firm of Cabot Brothers. Burrill became associated with Harvard professor Louis Aggassiz doing zoological illustrations for Aggassiz. After the Civil War, he opened a studio in Boston, sharing space with Albert Thompson.

In 1867 Burrill moved his residence to Lynn. In 1875 he opened a studio in Lynn, thereby establishing the foundation of the art colony in that city. Soon Clark Oliver opened a studio adjoining Burrill, and during the 1880s Lynn developed a number of good artists, of which the most important were Charles E. L. Green and Charles Woodbury.

In his early Lynn years Burrill made his living as an artist by executing crayon drawings of local citizens and by teaching drawing at the Lynn Evening Drawing School. By the 1880s and 1890s, he was able to concentrate more on his painting. He gave private painting lessons in various towns throughout New England, and he also gave instruction to the various Lynn artists.

Burrill's wife died on December 4, 1890. His production as a painter seems to have declined after 1900, when he moved to Swampscott to live with his son, Walter. He died in Swampscott on June 2, 1913.

LAURA COOMBS HILLS (1859-1952). *The Old Burying Ground, Newburyport*. ca. 1890, oil on canvas, 12 x 16 inches; anonymous loan.

Laura Coombs Hills, a native of Newburyport, had a diverse artistic career throughout her long life. She specialized in miniature portraits and, beginning in the 1920s was known for her colorful pastel "portraits" of flowers. She was also an illustrator and received many prizes and medals for her work between 1900 and 1928.

Hills used this sombre landscape subject more than once. Her small 1890 watercolor of the same subject is now in the collection of the Historical Society of Old Newbury.

HENRY R. KENYON (1861-1926). *Autumn Marshes, Ipswich*. ca. 1910, oil on board, 10 x 14 inches; lent by Childs Gallery, Boston.

Born into a Quaker family in Centerville, Rhode Island, Henry Kenyon attended the Rhode Island School of Design from 1879 to 1882. He studied painting in Paris and traveled in Brittany with the Ipswich artist Arthur Wesley Dow (1857-1922). As a result of this friendship, Kenyon moved to Ipswich. He and his wife, the artist Caroline Savory Kenyon, who was known for her portraits of children, lived at "Riverbank," off Labor-in-Vain Road.

Kenyon thought large canvases were pretentious; he exhibited his small landscapes in Boston, New York City, and Old Lyme, Connecticut, and was a member of the North Shore Art Association.

MARY BLOOD MELLEN (n.d.) *Half Moon Beach in Gloucester*. ca. 1855, oil on canvas, 15 x 21 inches; anonymous loan.

Mary Blood Mellen was born in Sterling, Massachusetts. Her parents, Reuben and Sally Blood, encouraged an early interest in drawing. Mellen was taught to use watercolors at Miss Thayer's School in Sterling; she developed skills in painting at Fryville Seminary in Bolton.

She married Reverend Charles W. Mellen, a Universalist minister, and during the 1850s they lived in Gloucester, where he was pastor of one of the three Universalist churches. The Mellens developed a friendship with the Gloucester artist, Fitz Hugh Lane, and Mary became Lane's pupil. The friendship with Lane was close enough for Lane to specifically mention both Mary and Charles in his will. The legacies gave Mary a self-portrait of Lane, and Charles received a sum of money "to purchase a token of my remembrance and friendship."

In 1860 Mary Mellen left Gloucester with Charles, who took over a congregation in Taunton. Lane must have remained in contact with her, for his will acknowledges her as a resident of Taunton. When Lane died in 1865 and her husband in 1866, Mary lost the two men who had directly encouraged her career as an artist.

Although there are no known Mellen paintings after 1860, a contemporary account published in 1882 mentions Mrs. Mellen as "living in Taunton and still actively engaged in her studio with good success." Her career as an artist needs further exploration.

WILLIAM EDWARD NORTON (1843-1916). *Essex County Coastline*. ca. 1880, oil on canvas, 16 x 27 inches; lent by Lepore Fine Arts, Newburyport, Massachusetts.

William Edward Norton was a student of George Inness (1825-1894), one of America's greatest landscape painters. Norton painted a number of coastal scenes on the North Shore, receiving gold medals and prizes in Boston, Chicago, Paris, and London exhibitions. He also painted many views of ships.

This somber preimpressionistic work was probably painted in the 1870s or 1880s.

GEORGE L. NOYES (1864-1954). *Gloucester Wharves*. ca. 1912, oil on cardboard, 13 x 14 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches; anonymous loan.

*Gloucester*. 1909, oil on cardboard, 14 x 12 inches; anonymous loan.

G. L. Noyes was born in Canada and studied art in Paris, and at the height of his career was called "the Monet of Boston." He traveled and painted in Mexico with Frederick E. Church (1826-1900). Cape Ann was a favorite outdoor painting location for Noyes.

In 1915 Noyes entered a painting in the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco and won a medal. Although today he is a lesser-known American impressionist painter, Noyes was nonetheless successful in capturing brilliant light and form with rich strokes of pigment.

FRANK K. M. REHN (1848-1914). *Rocky Coastal Scene*. 1875, oil on canvas, 25 x 36 inches; A. P. H. Waller & Son Antiques, Essex, Massachusetts.

*On Cape Ann*. ca. 1880, oil on canvas, 16 x 24 inches; lent by Lepore Fine Arts, Newburyport, Massachusetts.

Frank K. M. Rehn was born in Philadelphia and painted in Magnolia, on Cape Ann. Elected to the National Academy of Design in 1908, he is one of the few members represented in this exhibition. He retained a studio in New York City on the top floor of the Hotel Chelsea. Rehn was also a member of the Society of American Artists.

Rehn won gold medals and prizes for his seascapes exhibited in this country and in Paris, although he never traveled overseas. The artist loved Magnolia, and he painted in the picturesque area with his contemporaries John Henry Twachtman (1853-1902), Childe Hassam (1859-1935), and William Merritt Chase (1849-1916).

WILLIAM T. ROBINSON (b. 1852). *Off Tuck's Wharf, Marblehead.* ca. 1895, oil on canvas, 23½ x 39½ inches; lent by the Peabody Museum of Salem.

W. T. Robinson was born in Somerville, Massachusetts, and lived and painted in nearby Malden. He studied painting at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris and at the Gobelins Tapestry School.

This marine view of Marblehead harbor was probably painted in the 1890s, judging from the steam yacht, which closely resembles the *Erl King* of that period.

FRANCIS HENRY RICHARDSON (1859-1934). *Ipswich Meadows in March.* ca. 1915, oil on canvas, 24 x 32 inches; lent by Ipswich Public Library.

The landscape painter Francis H. Richardson was born and lived in Ipswich. He studied with William Morris Hunt (1824-1879) in Boston. He also studied in Paris and exhibited in the Paris Salon between 1888 and 1900, winning a prize in 1899. The artist's paintings are included in many area collections.

JOHN W. A. SCOTT (1815-1907). *Gloucester.* ca. 1860, oil on canvas, 14½ x 20½ inches; anonymous loan.

John White Allen Scott painted portraits and worked as a lithographer at Pendleton's firm in Boston. Born in Dorchester, Massachusetts, Scott painted on Cape Ann in the mid nineteenth century and was a friend of Fitz Hugh Lane. This landscape falls within the period between 1855 and 1860, when artists such as Lane, Martin Johnson Heade (1819-1904), and others were attracted by the effects of brilliant light reflected on the waters of Cape Ann.

T. V. C. VALENKAMPH (1868-1924). *Heading Out — Sunrise, Gloucester*. ca. 1910, oil on canvas, 12½ x 16½ inches; anonymous loan.

*Norman's Woe, Magnolia*. ca. 1910, oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches; anonymous loan.

Theodore Victor Carl Valenkamph was born in Stockholm, Sweden, and died in East Gloucester. He painted hundreds of marine scenes on Cape Ann. Valenkamph was a member of the Boston Art Club, which was established in 1840.

Often inebriated, Valenkamph lived and died in East Gloucester. Every Saturday morning he would go downtown with a couple of paintings and exchange them for wine for himself and fish for his many cats.

The Magnolia shore seen in the background of the painting of *Norman's Woe* appears less treacherous than the one described by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his 1841 poem, "The Wreck of the Hesperus." The top stretcher of this canvas is stamped by an early, if not the first, gallery to sell the painting: N. M. Vose, of Providence, Rhode Island.

THEODORE WENDEL (1858-1932). *The Lower River, Ipswich*. 1908, oil on artist board, 30½ x 37½ inches; anonymous loan.

*Farm Scene*. ca. 1886, oil on canvas, 13½ x 22 inches; anonymous loan.

Theodore Wendel, who lived in Ipswich for more than three quarters of his life, is more closely linked with mainstream impressionism than any other artist in this exhibition. He studied painting in Munich, Florence, and Venice, and he became a close friend of painters Frank Duveneck (1848-1919) and Elizabeth Boott Duveneck (1846-1888).

Theodore Wendel won silver medals and prizes for his paintings exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (1909) and at the Panama-Pacific Exposition (1915). The large 1908 view of Ipswich was exhibited in the Wendel retrospective held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1976. In 1982 and 1983 it was shown in "Iron Curtain" countries in a traveling exhibition of American Impressionism sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution.

The unsigned and undated landscape with farm buildings may have been painted in 1886 at Giverny, France, where Monet lived. Theodore Wendel painted there during the summers of 1886 and 1887 with John Leslie Breck (1860-1899) and Willard Leroy Metcalf (1855-1925). Wendel was a member of the Guild of Boston Artists and developed a reputation as the city's most successful landscape painter.

ROBERT D. WILKIE (1828-1903). *Kelp Gathering on the Beach at Gloucester*. ca. 1854, oil on canvas, 17 x 41 inches; anonymous loan.

Known for his White Mountain landscapes, Robert D. Wilkie was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He emigrated to the United States before 1853, when he began making illustrations for Gleason's *Pictorial Drawing Room Companion*.

According to Wilkie's granddaughter, he painted on the North Shore of Massachusetts in 1853-54 and from 1873 to 1878, and he worked as a lithographer for Louis Prang in Boston. Wilkie and his family resided in Boston and Roxbury, and he died in Swampscott at his only son's home.

Robert D. Wilkie was "rediscovered" by Vose Galleries of Boston, which mounted an exhibition of his works and published a chronology in 1948.

Phillips Library

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